

## **Title**

Representations of Chinese gendered and racialised bodies in contemporary media sites

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## **Abstract**

Social media are influential sociocultural forces that construct and transmit information about gender, health and bodies to young people in the digital age. In health and physical activity, Chinese people are often represented and positioned differently to other (minority) ethnic groups. For example, Black young people are often understood as having low academic motivations and aspirations but as ‘natural’ athletes; in contrast, Chinese young people, seen as the ‘model minority’ who excel in STEM subjects, are fragile, reserved and disinterested in physical movements. These public forms of representation may sit in opposition to the young people’s embodied identity. When these misrepresentations are internalised, issues such as micro-aggression and racism may have an impact on Chinese young people’s health and wellbeing. This paper aims to examine how Chinese bodies are gendered and racialised in contemporary social media sites (e.g. Google News, LiveJournal, Medium, Wordpress). Drawing on critical discourse analysis and Foucault’s concepts of normalisation and discursive practice, the paper will problematise the often taken-for-granted gendered and racialised stereotypes related to Chinese physicality and health on social media sites. Implications for developing future research and teaching resources in critical media health literacy for young people on issues related to gender and equity will be provided. The results affect how we understand, represent, and discuss Chinese (young) people on social media sites, thereby how Chinese young people engage, construct, and perform their embodied identities in Western, English speaking societies.

*Keywords: Chinese bodies, Critical Discourse Analysis, race, gender, critical media health literacy, social media*

## Introduction

Social media are influential sociocultural forces and transmitters of information about gender, health and bodies to young people in the digital age. In health and physical activity, Chinese young people are often represented and positioned differently to other (minority) ethnic groups. For example, in the United Kingdom (UK), Black<sup>i</sup> young people are often understood as having low academic motivations and aspirations but as ‘natural’ athletes; in contrast, Chinese young people, seen as the ‘model minority’ who excel in STEM subjects, are fragile, reserved and disinterested in physical movements (Archer & Francis, 2005; Author; Yeh, 2014). Brooks (2017) noted that while several studies have explored how Asian young people are represented in the UK media, the majority of them have focused on those of Indian and Pakistani descent, and often in relation to Islamophobia. In Australia, Watkins, Ho and Butler (2017) highlighted that the education setting is increasingly ethnicised, with Asian students both admired and resented for their educational success. Their ‘ethnic success’ is represented as doing ‘too well’ and threatening the privileged position of the White<sup>ii</sup> middle class in schooling and higher education systems. As Watkins et al. (2017) argue, ‘despite decades of multiculturalism in Australia, many Whites still perceive the country as “their space”’ (p. 2292). The stereotypes of the extremely competitive and instrumental ‘tiger mum’, over-achieving ‘dragon children’, and the super-rich investors and property purchases around high status school catchment areas, have given prominence to the debates and pathologisation around Asian success (Archer & Francis, 2007). Building on Brooks’ article which examined the representations of East Asian students in education in the UK media, this article extends understanding of how Chinese communities are represented in relation to their bodies, health, and gender, and their intersections within a global focus.

In sport, Chong (2013) examined the ways in which gender ideals and norms were inscribed onto athlete's bodies in China that promoted its national image of modernity on social media. She further discussed the importance of men, more than women, in winning a gold medal in the Olympic games to illustrate how gender intersects with Chineseness. The 'Chineseness' she referred to is linked to China's historical development and the political, economic and symbolic power of the nation as a whole. Often, the representation of Chinese men or the representation of China is juxtaposed as the West's feminised Other. The male body image therefore conveys a bio-political discourse that perpetuates what constitutes manliness and what needs to be done by Chinese men to achieve the 'norm'. Another example is how a tanned body in westernised cultures is often identified as a symbol of social status and healthy lifestyles (Author). However, a tanned Chinese body is associated with low social class and related to outdoor labour work. These examples of difference show how the aesthetic body is constructed and the meanings of a healthy and beautiful body cannot be taken for granted.

Hall (1996) noted that identity is conceptualised as the relationship between subjects and broader discursive practices. For young people, social media offers everyday discourses that play a key role in identity construction (Shi, 2010). In other words, identities are formed within social media as a discursive effect of a narrative of certain subject positions (Hall, 1996). When public forms of representation sit in opposition to young people's embodied identity, and when these misrepresentations are internalised, issues such as micro-aggressions and racism may have an impact on Chinese young people's health and wellbeing. For example, Chen and Jackson (2012) reported that Chinese young people's internalisation of dominant discourses around masculinity and bodies result in body dissatisfaction. This paper aims to examine how Chinese bodies intersecting with gender and race/ethnicity are

represented on contemporary social media sites (e.g. Google News, LiveJournal, Medium, Wordpress). This paper considers the following two questions:

- (1) What kind of masculinity and femininity ideals are related to Chinese bodies on social media sites?
- (2) How do these ideals convey certain forms of Chineseness in health, bodies and sport?

### **Health and bodily discourses on social media**

Youth engagement in social media provides them leverage and voice on a historically unprecedented way. This media prosumption (Ritzer, 2013) process of creating and consuming information simultaneously also facilitates the development of youth to ‘voluntarily’ participate in health promoting activities. However, this interaction can have both positive and harmful effects. For example, the construction of risks exists in regard to managing health and bodies in contemporary society. A milieu of health discourses, including healthism (Crawford, 1980), contribute towards a (re)production of pervasive pedagogical messages that present health as synonymous with a slender body achieved through merely regimented exercise and food intake. The discourses of ranking, quantification and performance limits our understanding of a range of possible healthy bodily practices by constructing the “norm” and the “others” (Burrows & Wright, 2004; Author)

Social media provides a frame for discourse around these important health issues, and it has been widely demonstrated that the development and reinforcement of stereotypes of minority groups are strongly influenced by the news and entertainment media. The role of the media is key to producing many of these racial categories (Gillborn, 2012; Hylton & Lawrence, 2015). As Hall (1990) argued, ‘the media construct for us a definition of what race is, what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the “problem of race” is understood to

be’ (p.11). Moreover, van Dijk (2000) has suggested that, instead of racism being enacted through legislation or physical violence, it is often played out via the popular media, through the subtle description of undeniable ‘facts’ about minority populations, which emphasises racial, ethnic, and/or class difference and presents these in contrast to those of the White population.

In relation to health, Lupton (2014) argues that when people have little room for resistance and when social media data are used as regulative and disciplinary devices to monitor, compare and normalise behaviours, then they could be at risk of public shaming. This raises concerns that people who are already marginalised in health and physical activity, such as minority youth, those who are non-white<sup>iii</sup>, inactive and those who choose not to conform to these monitoring practices of restricted measures of performance and fitness levels, could be further excluded. The effect of this ethnicised and racialised ‘groupism’ (Brubaker, 2003) on Chinese communities in health and physicality is to influence ways of seeing (or ignoring), of understanding (or not understanding), or representing (or not representing) and of remembering (or forgetting) who they are, what they ‘can do’ and who they ‘can be’ (Author) in performing health, gender and ethnicity.

An extensive search of academic databases failed to locate any recent studies which examined the representation of ‘Chinese health and bodies in social media’. Most of the research in ‘Western’ countries focuses on Anglo-Celtic student populations (e.g. Macdonald et al. 2005; Hickey 2008). There is limited research in relation to ethnic minority student populations (Thorjussen and Sisjord, 2018) such as South Asians in the UK (Stride, 2014), Muslim girls in the UK and Australia (Dagkas and Benn 2006; Knez 2007), Aboriginal people in Australia (Nelson, 2012), Māori and Pasifika (Pacific Island) in New Zealand (Fitzpatrick, 2013), migrants in Switzerland (Barker et al. 2014), Black and minority ethnic

groups in the UK (Flintoff, 2012) and African Americans (Oliver and Lalik, 2000). While previous research has explored Chinese Australian students' resources in their everyday lives, academic studies and physicality (Author), their perceptions and experiences in (health and) physical education (H)PE (Author) and the influences of Chinese families on their children's (H)PE and physical activity experiences (Author), this paper extends the field of research by examining how Chinese health and physicality are represented on contemporary social media sites.

Situated in the education context, critical media health literacy (Begoray, Banister, Higgins & Wilmot, 2015; Higgins & Begoray, 2012) provides a means by which youth can become more aware of the role that social media play, both positively and problematically, in shaping thoughts and practices. As mentioned previously, knowledge transmitted through social media can reinforce stereotypes and encourage people to reproduce negative feelings of themselves and other. This is what Gould reminds us, that 'our affective states are what temper and intensify our attentions, affiliations, investments, identifications, and attachments, they help to solidify some of our ideas and beliefs and attenuate others' (Gould, 2010, p. 33). The aim of this paper is therefore both conceptual and pedagogical. Conceptually, we hope to illuminate how contemporary social media sites are representing Chinese youth's physicality and health. By drawing on critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Foucault's normalisation and discursive practice we will discuss the impact of discourses that are communicated through the images. Working within the CDA framework, we challenge the dominant discourses around health and physicality predominantly around Westernised cultures, and foster alternative ways of thinking, doing health, and educating about health among youths and educators.

## **Foucault's Normalisation and Discursive Practice**

This section discusses how Foucault's concepts of normalisation and discursive practice are implicated in relations to power, and how they can be used to explain the reproductions of meanings in our understandings of health and bodies. For Foucault, discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). When people engage in certain health discourses, they become an embodied subject in relation to particular positions. This is what Foucault terms as 'discursive practice'. Foucault asserts that each society or culture perpetuates its own dominant discourse of values, and that those discourses are an instrument of power that are considered to be 'true' (Foucault, 1981). In the context of media representations, certain gendered and racialised discourses in relation to Chinese communities are often taken as the regimen of truth in contemporary societies. Foucault purports that when these 'truths' are deeply inscribed in people's understanding of what is 'normal', they become a powerful instrument for people to conform to one ideal and limit acceptable meanings of health and physicality. That is, this silencing of alternative understandings creates 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1981) that undermines 'differences' and thereby how we represent and discuss physicality and health about Chinese communities on social media.

## **Methods**

The data under investigation are 113 articles gathered from six popular English-language online blogging and news sites: Google News, LiveJournal, Medium, The Conversation, Weebly and Wordpress. These sites variously allow users to publish their own content, or they collate content published on other news sites, for instance BBC News and CNN. The articles were collated using a key terms search method and within a 5-year time (2012-2016) period to ensure contemporary topics were included for analysis. These key terms include



four broad areas: Chinese masculinity, Chinese femininity, Chinese health, and Chinese bodies. Articles were retrieved if they met the following criteria: were in English, located in the previously named online sites, and had at least one of the search terms in the headline, lead paragraphs, and/or indexing. Initially, 196 articles were retrieved from the primary search using the combinations of key terms (Table 1). Following a first reading of the titles to determine its relevance for possible inclusion, 113 articles were chosen for a second reading of their contents. After the second reading and the removal of duplicates 88 articles were retained for analysis. The authors then explored the texts of these 88 articles to determine their context and contents relevant to the topic under examination. Finally, 35 of them were chosen for a discourse analysis and the authors conducted the following analytical procedures to yield the results and discussion.

Insert Table 1.

Discourse analysis is concerned with how meaning is constructed in a text by analysing the language or symbols that are used, particularly with reference to ‘power and control as they are expressed through language within the wider context by society and culture’ (Bazeley, 2013, p. 216). Discourse ‘refers to groups of statements that structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking’ (Rose, 2013, p. 190). van Dijk’s (2015) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) guidelines were consulted to investigate how discourses maintain dominant views that contribute to social inequality.

According to van Dijk (2015, p. 466), CDA studies how power and inequality are ‘enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk.’ With an aim to address social problems, CDA can highlight the ideological work done through discourse to construct society and culture and maintain power relations. Although there is not a single theoretical framework for CDA, generally CDA supports the idea that powerful groups control texts which then controls the minds and actions of less powerful groups. By implementing CDA, we could investigate the production and reproduction of discourses of gender, health, and the body. The results could be used as examples to promote positive understanding about Chinese young people and as they engage and perform their embodied identities in Western, English speaking societies.

In the following results and discussion section, we have combined the statements, structure and contexts of the articles and interpreted the material with the following questions in mind: Who created the material under analysis? What is their position on the topic being examined? How do their arguments draw from and in turn contribute to commonly accepted knowledge of the topic at the time and in the place that this argument was made? And most importantly: who might benefit from the discourse that the sources construct?

A coding framework was initially developed to ‘break open’ the data sources (Bazeley, 2013) around the categories of gender (constructions of masculinity and femininity); the body; sport; and health. Both authors read the 35 news articles and created memos about the linguistic, discursive and visual symbols or techniques used in the headline, article and accompanying images, prompted by the coding framework. Salient and recurring ideas were discussed in conversation between the two researchers in order to refine their understanding of the categories and enhance the credibility of the analysis. Following van

Dijk's (2015) emphasis on such techniques as expression, implication, presupposition, and metaphor, the 35 articles were read for how gender, obesity and the body were constructed in language as they related to China or Chinese young people and hence how they produced ideas about Chinese communities. Memo writing continued as the data were read again and the framework was adjusted. The categories were refined around the themes of "What China 'is not'", "Femininity", "Sport Cultures", and "Fatness and Health".

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Theme 1: What China 'is not'***

In this analysis category, tropes and devices used to differentiate or 'other' China and Chinese people in relation to the West were noted. It was common for Western writers to draw on some stereotypes concerning China in their discussion of subjects such as health and sport. These included the communist regime; the one-child policy; Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism and Taoism; the great size of the population yet the seeming homogeneity of beliefs and behaviours. Not all mentions of these phenomena were stereotypical, as some articles drew specifically on relevant cultural ideas to explain Chinese perspectives on sport or the body. Yet frequently Chinese people's behaviours were presented as more simple compared to the complexities of American people's behaviours, for instance:

*it does not appear that anyone has really figured out exactly who he [the American man] is, nor is there a consensus around what he wants .... In China, however, the advertising message across brands is simple: your appearance is critical to your professional success. (Beautifully International, 2010)*

Some of the articles relied on constructing Chinese difference for other reasons, such as using it in the process of critiquing something in the West: perhaps to challenge the perceived universality of an idea that the writer disagreed with. In the process of critiquing ideas, they drew from Chinese culture or society as different. The article was not ‘about’ China, but China was provided as an example to illustrate how other cultures at different points of history are different from the West. China becomes just a device by which to recentre the West. This was indicative of the basic understandings of China and Chinese culture where simple ideas are presented as insurmountable facts (van Dijk, 2000). There were few alternatives for describing and analysing China.

### ***Theme 2: Femininity***

Progress in gender equality in China has been presented as women ‘pushing ahead’ of men, with suggestions that there are concerns about this. Some articles presented China as wishing to return to a more traditional gendered society in which men are more powerful. The current situation of women’s roles, for instance dominating academically, was highlighted. In some this was lamented for the perceived deleterious effect on boys, a loss of masculinity due to a lack of role models. More than once, the perspective encountered suggested a zero sum game: if women gain equality through investment in their education, men are disadvantaged:

*With all of the energy and time spent on helping females to have the same education and equal opportunities as men many people are now afraid that males are starting to be more submissive than females. Some schools and day cares now have playtime designed to increase the masculinity of the boys. (Human Sexuality in the Chinese Culture, n.d)*

Although another blogger noted that it is mainly in Asia that traditional gender roles remain while there has been a shift to greater equality in the West, the discourse that girls are pushing ahead of boys has also been used to discredit the gains of feminism in the West (Skelton, 2010). Hence, contested discourses of feminism and equality in these sources are not dissimilar to those found in the West. Occasionally a brief history of equality in China was provided (noting the changes brought about by the Cultural Revolution and later by the growth of capitalism), at other times a lack of context provided readers with little to go on. With this perspective, the idea of China as a homogenous or singular entity, not a nation of diversity, is reified. China, in this sense, is represented as traditional, hierarchical, and patriarchal. One blogger wrote,

*China's traditional views on gender roles have been challenged the past few decades but there is still a strong need for equality.* (Human Sexuality in the Chinese Culture, n.d)

However, in this source, it is not clear in what aspects of equality there is this need, nor in whose eyes. As the writer continues, they suggest that women who comply with their husbands are passive, and as such the blogger aligns with a Western model of equality as sameness. Although the article uses some Chinese concepts to unpack what it means to be a man or woman in China (such as the relationship between Yin and Yang), there is not much sense that Yin and Yang represent complementarity.

Some articles, generally those in longer form, written by academics or reporting on academic research, took a different view on women's moves towards equality, and aimed to critique the current Western stereotypes of Asian gender representations. However, again

there are few alternatives for describing China and the Chinese, with an assumed homogeneity of character and beliefs. There were no mentions of the idea of dual femininities<sup>iv</sup> (Authors). Only two articles (one of which was a retelling of the first) drew from the idea of wen-wu dual masculinity<sup>v</sup>, in order to raise concerns with the way in which Chinese-American men are disadvantaged by Western constructions of physically strong masculinity:

*No man is lacking in either wen or wu. Ideally, the scholarly man is no more and no less masculine than the military man. However, wen has been the dominant ideal in Chinese culture for millennia. ... Ironically, men who follow Western masculinity ... would be given less honor as that conferred to the intellectuals in Chinese society.*  
(Cao, 2016)

A third article suggested wen-wu but did not name it specifically, to explain changes in the perception of Chinese masculinity that occurred with Bruce Lee, the 1970s movie star, and the difference between western masculinity (hyper-masculine) and Asian masculinity (submissive) until Lee presented Asian masculinity as compatible with a muscular physicality. However, it would appear that Lee has had little long term or far reaching influence on constructions of Chinese masculinity in the West. For a long time feminist theories of gender have noted constructions of masculinity are always in relation to constructions of femininity: femininity is the opposite or the other to the masculine norm (Connell & Connell, 2005). Masculinity is defined by what it is not. We found in descriptions of Chinese masculinity the construction of difference was not always in opposition to Chinese femininity but sometimes to Western masculinity: the ‘hard’ and physical masculinity of Australian men, for instance, constructed as opposite the ‘soft’ and scholarly

masculinity of Chinese or Asian men. This constructs Chinese men as weak compared to Western men and even to Western women:

*Whenever a relationship consisting [sic] a Chinese man and a foreign woman comes to light, exclamation can be expected, as if some wonder has happened. (Tree Hole, 2016)*

If there are few alternatives to the stereotype of Chinese men as weak presented in dominant discourse, the existence and experiences of Chinese men who perform other masculinities are rendered invisible. As another blogger (Cao, 2016) expressed it, when in the West, Chinese men's ideas about masculinity put them at a disadvantage. How do the different expectations have an impact on these Chinese men?

Although representation of diversity within China was often lacking, there were examples of distinguishing between different (East) Asian cultures. This typically took the form of demonstrating that Chinese women are less submissive than their Korean neighbours:

*Asian women [...] simply baffle me. I am not talking about Chinese women. The Chinese women remind me of the Russians, strong and stoic, perhaps a product of their political system. I am talking about Asian women from Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and the other various Asian islands. They exist in stark contrast to the Russian women. (Kateandculture, 2016)*

In this and other articles, submissive East Asian femininity was expressed as lesser than Western and Russian forms of femininity. Although the writer acknowledges there are

different forms or expressions of femininity in different places, there is an assumption that all the women in a nation will express the same femininity – there is little diversity afforded within nations. This has implications for Asian women in the West.

### ***Theme 3: Sport cultures***

Two major elements of Chinese sporting culture were noted: first, the business opportunities available through accessing potential vast new audiences; and second, cultures of discipline in Chinese sport. China is highlighted as the global economic force, drawing on discourses of business potential and growth. China is constructed as having a ‘factory approach’ to socio-economic growth and development, emphasising its overseas investment in Manchester City and the scale of President Xi Jinping’s plans to develop a large number of football (soccer) grounds. The analysed articles constructed a view that there is little existing sport culture or fan base in the country yet simply investing will produce interest ‘naturally’. China is positioned as both the global economic power and as an emerging market for sport and exercise due to the sheer scale of it: new sports clubs are numbered in the thousands. There is little shared about current interest in football in China and hence the feasibility of investments; nor the relative success of the women's national team; only the big business, men's club side of it, football as entertainment and business. That said, there is an example of Chinese sport being exported to other countries, with dragonboat racing finding growing popularity in Australia due to the teamwork element. Likewise, the sport is also connected to social status, with images of dragonboats set against the backdrop of expensive yachts and low-rise apartments, signifying a connection to middle and upper social classes.

Discourses of sporting culture in China itself focused on sports where China is known to have had success, such as weightlifting. Coverage on Olympic sport in *Time* (Beech, 2016)



also highlighted Chinese financial investment but suggested that this investment is a ‘waste’ to the country:

*Chinese sports czars funneled money to pursuits like weightlifting, which are less lavishly funded in other nations. (Beech, 2016)*

China's emphasis on athletics over a holistic education for talented young people was critiqued with a report that parents are questioning putting their children in this system with little chance of success. This is in particular when China's position in the Olympic Games seems to be slipping – in the Rio Games, China lost its first place on the medal table to the USA. The article first highlights how successful China has been in getting Olympic medals and in training their athletes. However, it then contrasted these successes with doping allegations. The author, Beech, suggested that they did not believe the Chinese weightlifting association was ‘shocked’. This perspective was supported by the words of a whistle blower, stating that she didn't know what – medicine or drugs – she was taking. This article constructs the idea that Chinese athletes have little freedom and autonomy once they are part of a team - they do everything with the team and must stick to strict training regimes. The idea that an athlete would not know what she was taking would fit with this image: if you do everything for your coach and never get any outside perspective, you trust them. A final story suggested the journalist had formed an opinion already:

*What were the pills for? I asked one girl. “It’s medicine to make me strong,” she told me. An alarmed coach intervened, described the pills as “natural herbs” and tried to hustle me from the room. When I asked if I could take one of the pills home with me —*

*I wanted to see whether it really was just herbs — he refused. His excuse? They were too expensive to waste on someone not in the Chinese sports system. (Beech, 2016)*

Many examples of Chinese women entering the Western news or popular imagination come from the world of sport, particularly Olympic endeavours. Chinese female athletes are used at various times to comment on femininity and womanliness. A CNN article (Jones, 2016) used Chinese swimmer Fu Yuanhui to highlight issues that the writer, Roxanne Jones (someone with experience of writing about women in sport, according to the bio on the article), perceived in Western feminism. Fu had lost a race and in an interview explained that it was due to her period:

*"I feel I didn't swim well today. I let my teammates down. Because my period came yesterday, I'm feeling a bit weak, but this is not an excuse," said Fu after the 20-year-old won a bronze medal for her nation in the women's 4x100-meter medley relay in Rio on Sunday. (cited in Jones, 2016)*

Jones follows this with her own comment noting that American constructions of Chinese women are stereotypical:

*Wait. Doesn't this fly in the face of the west's old, stereotypical view that women in China are meek and oppressed? Doesn't the feminist flag wave only for American women, perhaps most particularly white women?*

We interpret this to mean that Jones sees Fu as having been bold and empowered in talking about her period, challenging the Western view of Chinese women as meek. For Jones, Fu's

words are feminist, and she references the ‘arrogance of Western feminism’, and its ethnocentric universalist claims to be able to define what both women and feminism are. Jones views this as hypocritical given that Western feminism, in Jones’ view, treats menstruation with shame. Yet Jones also implicitly draws from discourses of universalist feminism herself by claiming that women have womanly qualities that should be celebrated: Fu ‘remind[s] us how all women are connected through our sameness’.

#### ***Theme 4: Fatness and health***

The search results, using key terms ‘health’ and ‘bodies’, indicated that most of the returned articles were related to obesity and fatness. Reports on obesity rates in China brought up a number of tropes used to construct a picture of Chinese people. Due to the vast population size of the country, presenting the raw numbers of how many people are overweight or obese in the country has a certain effect for Western readers: the sheer scale of everything renders China amazing and strange. However, it is not only in relation to China that words such as ‘skyrocketed’, ‘explosion’ or ‘exploded’ are used to report on obesity rates, as these are common tropes in the West also. News sources that might present nuanced views on gender constructions cannot be relied on to do the same when the topic is obesity and overweight. Obesity was sometimes presented as bad news in and of itself: perhaps no discussion of the potential implications of levels of overweight and obesity. Clues could be gained from images placed in some articles, such as in one news report from the BBC (2016); an image of a male patient, visibly overweight, having his blood pressure taken by a female, not visibly overweight, medical practitioner. These images imply that health concerns align with weight. In another image in this article, the same patient is shown with no top on, and the camera angle is such that his body takes up a large amount of the photo; it emphasises his size and the medicalisation of obesity.

In some articles, China was represented as behind the West or looking to the West in order to address obesity through ‘adoption of Western aspirations’ where the West is seen as normative and more progressive in its thinking about obesity, food, or exercise. One perspective was that Chinese women have little knowledge of how to exercise effectively, and are reluctant to engage in activity that will make them sweat, quoting women who reportedly have quit attending pilates classes or the gym because ‘[I] really had little clue what I was doing’ (Ren, 2015). Chinese women who have spent time in the West and are more comfortable with vigorous exercise are presented as strange and ostracised. The suggestion is then that Chinese constructions of femininity are negatively affecting women’s health as they are unable or unwilling under dominant gender relations to engage in physical activity. While the writer’s intention may have been to call for greater learning about effective exercise, the piece also reconstructs the West and Western people as more knowledgeable about health and less restricted by gender norms. Here the two categories of gender and overweight are combined; constructions of Asian or Chinese women as submissive and hyper-feminine are said to impact on their health. However, the closing message is that attitudes to women’s body size and femininity performance have not caught up with the reality of large bodies – hence perhaps exercising needs to become more socially acceptable.

In contrast to other sources representing Chinese femininity as embedded in slenderness and submissiveness, one article presented a different view of overweight women in China. The writer begins with her own experience (a Western woman living in China) and her difficulties finding clothes to fit even though she is a ‘size 10’ which is XXL in China. She describes a movement in China called ‘Girls Happy Being Fat’ and one activist in this

movement, Zeng Jing. The blogger sees this movement as something of a radical reframing of fatness. The juxtaposition of 'Girls Happy Being Fat' with previous articles framing Chinese women as hyper-feminine or passive is stark:

*The most positive aspect of Zeng's career is not, however, her ability to exhibit her weight as an element of beauty. It is her promotion of confidence and self-worth that separates her from the cannibalistic ruthlessness of Chinese fashion.* (My Chinese Dream, 2013)

The association made between female, celebrity, fat, happy, confident, and beauty is however followed with comments by the blogger on the relationship between health and the risks of obesity. Even when fatness is discussed in a positive light, discourses of health risks are typically included. Nevertheless this article counteracts some pervasive discourses on obesity and might challenge people's understanding of what beauty in relation to fatness means.

## **Conclusion**

In the context of the digital age, social media are increasingly central as systems of representation of identity, culture and community. However, research focusing on ethnic minority people's health and physicality in social media and the relations to the intersections of race, gender and power is rare. This paper juxtaposes health, bodies and physicality, and Chinese communities in order to analyse the representation of gender and race on social media.

This paper has extended current understanding of Chinese bodies both conceptually and pedagogically. Conceptually, the inclusion of various concepts regarding the Chinese

gendered and racialised body and the use of dual femininity and wen-wu to expand the knowledge base where health and body representations are concerned. We have also discussed current social media sites as knowledge producers who provide few alternatives for describing and analysing China/Chinese people in health and sport. Although not all the articles concerned Chinese youth, a critical understanding of Chinese physicality and health has crucial implications for teachers and students in (H)PE.

When applied to exploring the voicing of Chinese health and bodies, the notions of dual femininity and wen-wu can serve as an intellectual asset that redistributes the focus of a unidirectional Euro-American theoretical current in social media representations. It calls for Chinese communities such as students to rethink their resources in relation to their bodies, health and physical activity practices. This position means that Chinese students can focus on what they are capable of being and doing in health and physical activity and can take up the cultural dispositions and theoretical Chinese concepts in constructing their health identities that are meaningful to them. Moreover, it complements their needs in relation to structural demands. For their peers, teachers and researchers, this means not positioning Chinese students as ‘problems’ to be solved or as ‘at risk’ but as ‘assets’ to diversity education. More specifically, this notion can be used as a reflection tool and to empower Chinese students to make changes to their health and bodily practices. The alternative discourses also allow Chinese students to articulate their rights and experiences with respect to combating an assemblage of power inequalities in their health and physical activity environments.

From the review of social media sites, we believe there is a dearth of knowledge in how we understand how the ‘other’ construct meanings of health and physicality. For example, only four of the articles from social media sites were written by a Chinese author,

with many others focusing on the experiences of Westerners visiting China. Of the news site articles, those sources based in Asia for an English-reading audience presented more nuance in their discussions of China and other Asian nations than did news sites based in the West. As shown in the results, current social media space is dominated by social media-*on* minorities, highlighting their differences to the West. We therefore need to teach students in distinguishing between social media-*by*, social media-*for*, and social media-*about* minorities. Social media-*by* minorities will serve to provide more platforms for their voices in bodily representations and alternative views that challenge dominant discourses; social media-*for* minorities offer an anchor in which minorities can develop a sense of belonging and affiliation to role models; social media-*about* minorities opens up the space for dialogues and negotiations on controversial topics and enhance understanding in complementary differences (Author) in bodily practice and representations.

Highlighting the links between social media, Chinese bodies, and the possible effect they may have on our understanding and public pedagogy, we underline the need to examine how the social meanings that underpin these kinds of affective communities can constitute identities. Doing so is critical as it provides a pathway through which educators can rethink Chinese bodies through the type of social emotional dispositions that traditional disembodied approaches perpetuate. We should interrogate the complex and contradictory media landscape that often simultaneously marginalises and empowers.

Pedagogically, learning how to incorporate social media constructively in representing Chinese communities' health and bodies is valuable. Following Bernstein (2001), we are living in a 'totally pedagogised society' where education is no longer confined to formal institutions such as schools. How can educators draw on the powerful effect of the

social media in teaching topics on Chinese youth, health and physicality? In other words, what does critical media health literacy look like when we take into account the knowledge extended in this article? Indeed, Freire (1970) highlights ‘problem posing’ can be used to provoke students’ discussion and to encourage dialogue about inequalities in social media representations. In doing so, students can also use social media as a tool of resistance, an act of counter-hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), to produce alternative images and discourses related to the health and physicality of Chinese communities. These competing discourses and images can possibly create more nuanced understandings of gendered and racialised bodies which goes beyond the ‘truth’ thereby teaches students to become critical consumers of today’s social media sites.

As educators, we have used Twitter and Facebook to keep our students and followers up to date on news that involves social and political issues related to health, bodies, physical activity, Chinese communities, and the intersections of these topics. This form of public pedagogy is equally important as those inside the classrooms in order to teach students how to develop critical consciousness, engage civically with the society and the world, and to participate in the global dialogue. To create an active, authentic, participatory and empowering learning environment, as educators, we could include creative forms of pedagogy/assessment, such as music/video production using Sound Cloud and iMovie, to produce teaching materials as well as to enable students in developing media production skills. As Begoray, Banister, Higgins and Wilmot (2014) showed, asking students to create multimedia representations has been effective in disrupting gender stereotypes and inequities in a classroom setting.



It is possible to argue that when youths and educators are critically engaged in the discourses, they will be more informed to make counter-media health productions and foster media health literacy. The results affect how we understand, represent, and discuss Chinese people on media sites, thereby how Chinese young people engage and perform their embodied identities in Western, English speaking societies.

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<sup>i</sup> In the UK, Black denotes an ethnic minority group which includes Black African, Caribbean and Black British (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Ethnic minority refers to a socially identified population which shares distinctive characteristics and differentiates themselves from the dominant group and/or that experiences disadvantages or inequality as a result of discrimination (Healey, 2006).

<sup>ii</sup> White is used as a racial term in this paper. Race is understood as a social construct more than a physical essentialism. The concept of race is useful for the interrogation of power relations, in particular to who has the power to define race and its social consequences in everyday practice (Fenton, 2010).

<sup>iii</sup> Non-white is used in this paper to denote people who are not of European origin and those who do not have the skin colour of European descent.

<sup>iv</sup> Dual femininities is an attempt to balance 'modern' and traditional Chinese ideals in being a modern female. This concept embodies both 'autonomous' and 'dependence' aspects of

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femininity and provides an alternative lens that argues against the neoliberal discourses of aspirations, individualism and personal responsibility (Authors).

<sup>v</sup> Louie (2002) discusses the wen-wu paradigm that originates from the Yin–Yang system and is useful in explaining the conceptualisation of Chinese male and female body practices in contemporary culture. Wen includes qualities such as scholarly, mental and literary, and Wu includes qualities such as martial arts, physical skills and power.